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LETTER

TO

WILLIAM PALEY, M. A.

ARCHDEACON OF CARLISLE,

FROM

A POOR LABOURER,

IN ANSWER TO

HIS REASON FOR CONTENTMENT.

ADDRESSED TO THE

LABOURING PART

OF THE

BRITISH PUBLIC.

"The obscure millions of a great empire have much less to dread from "the cruelty than the avarice of their masters; and their humble "happiness is principally affected by the grievance of excessive "taxes, which gently pressing on the wealthy, descend with acce- "lerated weight on the meaner, and more indigent classes of "society"

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1793.

BRITISH MUSEUM

LETTER

TO

WILLIAM PALEY,

ARCHDEACON OF CARLISLE.

REVEREND SIR,

YESTERDAY, returning from that labour which you have attempted to perſuade me and the reſt of my brethren is the grand ingredient of human happineſs, my eye was caught by the title of your book, and hopes were inſtantly excited, that ſuch a ſubject, engaged in by you, for I have lived in your neighbourhood, and know that you have got a character for humanity, would afford us at leaſt ſome conſolation, if not altogether remove the moſt diſtreſſing part of our caſe.—

My curioſity alſo was greatly awakened to know what reaſons could be given why we labourers ought to be contented, by a man who never worked in his life, and how he who never felt the anguiſh of dividing a mouldy cruſt among his famiſhed children,—when ſickneſs had compelled the ſmalleſt intermiſſion in that exceſſive labour, which, God knows, I find abſolutely neceſſary to keep us from ſtarving, could preſume to offer arguments to convince us, that we were unreaſonable, becauſe ſuch a ſtate did not afford us content. But, reverend Sir, I have heard that you are well acquainted with all the workings of the human mind, can account for all its operations, and can tell why we are delighted, and why we are depreſſed; you muſt therefore know, that hope is always liberal, and that ſhe will often miſlead us contrary to our reaſon and experience.

Thus deceived by expectation, I felt for the halfpence which were to procure ſtrength to my body, exhauſted by labour, to procure that men-

mental comfort which is promiſed by the title of your book. But when I left the ſhop, I felt a reproach within, from laying out that in viſionary ſchemes of comfort, which would certainly have procured ſome of my family eaſe, (as we wiſh for no more,) by allaying the preſſing demands of hunger and thirſt. We cannot like you, indulge both wants; if we ſatisfy the ſolicitude of the one, we muſt be tortured by the cravings of the other.—Judge then how great muſt have been my ſurpriſe and indignation, when I found myſelf deceived, and when I found that your title page, like that of the moſt proſtituted hireling, was a mere catchpenny,—that its object was not to leſſen the hardſhips of the labourer, but to ſecure to the rich and powerful their luxuries, extorted from the toil and miſeries of the poor!—Indeed your book worked in me the fulleſt conviction, that unleſs we poor will ſubmit to lead a life that is grievous to us, the rich will combine to plunge us in the moſt abject ſlavery. For if ſuch a man as the Archdeacon of Carliſle,

will unite againſt us, from whom can we expect ſuccour? who will befriend us? If ſuch a man, I ſay, ſo enlightened by ſtudy, ſo humane by nature, can be thus blinded by ſelf-intereſt, for what elſe could have induced him to remove from the wretched their only conſolation in diſtreſs, the hope of bettering their condition, what can be expected from the ignorant and the profligate? I will, however, no longer dwell upon the painful ſenſations excited in me by your book, but endeavour, as well as I am able, to ſhew, either that you are totally unacquainted with our ſufferings, and therefore cannot give us any good reaſons why we ſhould remain contented with our ſituation, or that you have inhumanly perverted your knowledge, to ſink us into a ſtate of apathy and deſpondence.

Firſt you declare that the place a man holds in ſociety reſembles the ſituation of a ſpectator in a theatre—where he never thinks of his ſituation ſo long as his mind is diverted by the ſcenery before him. I fully agree with you

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that this is juſt. But you muſt agree with me alſo that the moment the piece becomes unintereſting, and ceaſes to amuſe, his ſituation if a painful one, abſorbs his whole attention; and he begins naturally and involuntarily to make thoſe calculations you are ſo fond of in your book; when, if upon ſumming up the agreeables and diſagreeables, he finds the ballance againſt him, the reſult muſt be that he exerts himſelf to change his place; and will not deſiſt until he has obtained the eaſe neceſſary to enjoy the repreſentation before him; for you know it is with our ſenſations as it is with the preſent ſtate of ſociety; the ſtrongeſt always drive out the weakeſt—that is to ſay, if I have twenty degrees of pleaſurable feelings, and nineteen degrees of painful ones—notwithſtanding they are ſo nearly equal, yet the pleaſure exceeding the pain, the latter will be ſwallowed up by the former; and leave a ballance in my favour. I am in this caſe not only at my eaſe, but have then reaſon to be more than content with my ſituation, for upon looking

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ing round about me, I find one occupying the place I had juſt left—and others in ſituations equally bad; the ſenſation ſucceeding this compariſon, for it is in vain to diſſemble, is pleaſant, becauſe opinion greatly influences our happineſs, and we ſcarcely ever know what is good, but by a compariſon with the good o others. Why does the huſbandman liſten with eagerneſs to the tales of the wounded ſoldier, to the recital of the miſeries attending war, to the diſappointment of courtiers—but that the diſtreſs of others encreaſes the pleaſure of his own ſecurity and eaſe. I will grant that we feel pain and degradation, if upon this compariſon we ſee ourſelves far behind our fellows. But you will not pretend to deny that this is in the circle of inſtincts, which nature hath implanted in mankind for the moſt uſeful purpoſes.—To be relieved from this mortifying debaſement; he has an intereſt in being active; without which he would be on a level with the dull oyſter on his bed, without the power

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becauſe he has not the wiſh to change his ſituation. It is the ſpecific gift of nature that diſtinguiſhes the man from the brute. The brute is confined within the narrow circleo inſtincts neceſſary only to his animal exiſtence, and remains after a few years what he will be to the end of his life; while man beſides theſe has the noble privilege of paſſion and reaſon aſſigned him—and is in a continual ſtate of progreſſive improvement.

This principle is not then as you would make us believe incompatible with the good order of ſociety; nor does it interfere with the different claſſes which muſt exiſt in it. But on the contrary it is to this principle alone that there are degrees in rank, without it you never would have been Arch Deacon of Carliſle. You never would have pointed out to us the road to contentment; or your imagination now pleaſe itſelf with the proſpect of future privileges and mitres. We never lamented (as you declare), the ſucceſs of talents, nor the reward of continued induſtry, let that ſucceſs be never ſo great; it rather ſerves as a ſtimulus

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to our exertions, we experience on the contemplation, a momentary elevation of mind, and receive from it a full aſſurance that ſuch will be our fate, if ſuch ſhall be our actions. But when we ſee in ſociety, men whoſe enjoyments are founded in tyranny and injuſtice, and in the midſt of ſeveral millions of oppreſſed wretches, a few only with exorbitant wealth, inſulting over the miſery of all, our indignation is rouſed, and we feel that unanimity alone is wanting to correct ſuch oppreſſion.

You ſtrangely deceive yourſelf, if you believe, that where laws are equal, individuals amaſs enormous fortunes, and that theſe enormous fortunes in the hands of ſingle perſons, are beneficial to the ſtate. They proceed from the excluſive privilege which one man enjoys over all others, to buy and ſell,—a privilege ſo deſtructive, that wherever it exiſts, it converts the moſt fertile plains into barren heaths, and proſpects the moſt delightful, to countries more equally governed, are changed here into wilds of the moſt unmea-

immeaſurable deſcription. All the evils of mankind from a ſocial reaction have their principal origin in this monopoly of honour and places, privileges and riches. It creates indigence, which in its turn produces crowds of corrupt wretches, ſo unaccountably blind and ſtupid, as to forget even the love of ſelf, kiſs the hand that enſlaves them, and exert all their ſkill and induſtry to ſatisfy only the luxury of the rich. The enormous opulence of one man thus raiſed upon the ruin of the multitude, is a diſorder ſo deſtructive, that in whatever country it exiſts all induſtry is driven out, all liberty is deſtroyed. Yet, ſays Archdeacon Paley, who can help it, it is much better that it ſhould be ſo, than that the rules themſelves ſhall be broken up. I grant much better for that claſs in ſociety who obtain by a long train of mean ſervilities only, thoſe lucrative ſituations, which teaches them theſe leſſons, and which they readily learn, becauſe it is their intereſt; 1ſt, that the immenſe taxes raiſed on the lower orders are beneficial to the ſtate; 2dly, that the poor ſhould for ever toil and labour to ſatisfy the caprices of thoſe, whom the favour of the prince have

placed in ſuch offices; 3dly, and that a nation of Lords and Valets is in a better ſtate, than a people who live in eaſy circumſtances and are free and independent. But I conſole myſelf in the reflection, that the people have their ſeaſon as well as the privileged few. Our winter was gone by, and full of hopes I now ſee ſpring approaching. With confidence we look forward to the protection of the God of All Nature, who by the deepeſt affliction, often prepares us for the enjoyment of the greateſt good, as a plentiful Autumn often ſucceeds the ſevereſt winter. O you then who have already received the favours of heaven, look upon without deſpiſing thoſe, whom it has already oppreſſed with misfortunes. Ridicule us not by telling us, that the inceſſant labour, which ſcarcely procures us a ſcanty meal, is among the beſt gifts of heaven, and that becauſe among ſeveral thouſands of labouring poor, the proud head of ſome extortioners inſults over our diſtreſſes, the ſame laws, which caſts theſe enormous eſtates in the hands of one Great Man, equally protects and guards the poor man.

man. Will you ſay that the Corporation Laws are no checks to our induſtry, by deſtroying the competition which exiſts almoſt in all trades, when not barred by excluſive privileges. How many a ſtarving but ſkilful artificer, is prevented working in the ſame corporate town, where the rich man is allowed to trade. You will not deny that the laws of ſettlement preclude many a poor man from making the moſt of his trade, by confining him to a particular pariſh, where he ſcarcely can earn by it a ſubſiſtence for himſelf alone; and if unfortunate enough to have a family, ſtarvation is the neceſſary conſequence, Whereas if he had been allowed to employ his induſtry where it would have produced the greateſt returns, his family might have been ſaved from want. How hard is that fate, when a man is willing to work if he can get it, but is ſhut out from the honeſt profits of his labour, by cruel privileges and monopolies.

There are indeed many laws which not only retard our advancement in ſociety but are purpoſely enacted to oppreſs the poor

man, and to favour the rich. Thus no maſter Taylor ſhall by the 8th of George the Third give more than 2s. 7d. ½ per day, except in caſe only of a general mourning, or ſhall the workmen receive more under the ſevereſt penalties. Does not this Statute deſtroy all deſire of becoming able and induſtrious? for wherefore ſhould induſtry be exerted when it would be placed upon the ſame footing with idleneſs? Laws alſo exiſt to puniſh ſeverely that combination of workmen, which has only for its object, the forcing maſters, to yield that to neceſſity, which they refuſe to do to juſtice; that is, to pay to workmen what their induſtry and talents honeſtly deſerve. How many poor fellows have lately been ſent to Newgate, for demanding the juſt reward of their labour, and dexterity? This moſt ſacred property, the only patrimony of the poor, is daily and continually violated, without exciting the leaſt intereſt in our humane law-givers to propoſe a remedy to this general oppreſſion. When on the other hand maſters are not only allowed to aſſociate and bind each other by private bonds, and

penalties,

penalties, to keep down, and reduce the wages of workmen with impunity; but the legiſlature authoriſes and ſupports this unjuſt and oppreſſive combination. This however is not to be wondered at, as maſters from this inequality of rights, from this encroachment on the juſt liberties of workmen, are enabled to have advocates, among our legiſlators, and indeed to become legiſlators themſelves.

Who can then wonder, that where ſuch inſtitutions exiſt, the jails ſhould be crowded with miſerable wretches, and the ſtreets lined with ſtarving beggars? Who can pretend to ſay, that the laws in ſuch a country, equally protect the rich, and the poor? In a country, where the means of avoiding conviction, and baffling the wholeſome rigour of juſtice, are ſo numerous, and ſo eaſily obtained by the daring and ſucceſsful adventurer, the only criminals who perpetrate great crimes, and who commits the greateſt injuries upon ſociety, that there we ſee the ſhivering wretch only ſuffering the utmoſt rigour of their penal Statutes; a wretch urged by his own

own hunger, (for it is not among thoſe wants that can be deferred,) and the agonizing calls of his ſtarving children, to commit the petty theft for which his life is forfeited; whilſt the rapacious invader of the rights and properties of a whole people, is ſuffered to enjoy his polluted wealth, upon the now eſtabliſhed condition, of ſharing the ſpoil with thoſe who pointed out the game, and ſecures him his retreat.

In a country thus corrupted by avarice and voluptuouſneſs, few are to be found who will plead the cauſe of the unfortunate, few will penetrate into the gloomy retreats of indigence, liſten to their misfortunes, or offer conſolation. The benevolence of the world is now confined to the great. With what indignation do I hear their ſmalleſt inconvenience magnified into calamities, while the miſeries of the poor are unworthy conſideration. The rich no ſooner feel diſtreſs than crowds are ready to ſympathize with, and conſole them, and their grief inſtantly gives place to conſiderations of vanity. But the

poor

poor muſt ſtruggle through want, and deſpair, without the ſympathy that will pity or the benevolence that will ſuccour. The clergy indeed ſtep forward with a pious zeal, to offer reaſons why the men, whoſe every hour contains more wretchedneſs, than is to be found in all the lives of the whole bench of Biſhops put together, ought to be content, without preſenting the means of enſuring their ſucceſs. But the virtue of ſpeaking not of acting is peculiar to that order. The clergy alſo declare they love poverty, but how does hiſtory prove the truth of this declaration? From the actions of men, and not their words, we muſt judge of their ſincerity, and in moſt countries the revnues of the clergy, equal the whole revenue of the ſtate, and in ſome countries it exceeds it, this has convinced me they do not wiſh their own poverty, but that all the world beſides themſelves ſhould be poor. It ſtruck me upon reading your book that you were governed by the ſame principle. I will then, beſides the refutation which you yourſelf give, to the truth of your doc-

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trines, by not adopting what you think ſo deſireable, attempt alſo to prove from my own experience, that they are entirely falſe, and that they were dictated not by your humanity but by your ſelf-love.

Firſt you declare that it is the ineſtimable bleſſing of ſuch ſituations, that they ſupply a conſtant train of employment both to body and mind; and hence the poor are not afflicted with that languor which oppreſſes the rich. This is granted, provided the poor man enjoys a certain degree of eaſe, and may by moderate labour ſupply his own wants, and thoſe of his family: But if after exceſſive labour, his wants ſtill remain unſatisfied, the idea of labour can only bring along with it the idea of pain. Every man has natural and phyſical wants, which when ſatisfied, leave the inhabitants of the cottage and the palace in equal repoſe. No earthly happineſs goes beyond this ultimatum: At which when we once arrive we ſhould ſtagnate, and be deſtroyed by chagrine, if not again ſet in motion by new deſires. To ſatisfy their preſſing ſolicitude,

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we are urged into action, yet always experiencing more pain from our wants, than pleaſure from our enjoyments; the greater part of our felicity being merely a relief from pain, and only meaſured by the leaſt quantity of evil that is ſuffered. That a juſt judgment might be formed upon the happineſs or miſery of any man, we muſt examine alſo, not only its intenſeneſs, but its duration. When a tooth-ache has continued ſometime, and is very painful, and does not yield to mild applications, we then prefer the excrutiating, but momentary pain of extraction, to the leſſer yet continual torment; but though frequent—if ſo trifling as to occaſion only a ſlight inconvenience, we will endure it, rather than ſubmit to a ſhort, but very intenſe pain. It is the ſame with our pleaſures, we will prefer a moderate pleaſure that is laſting, to a great one, that will paſs away in a moment; but will prefer the pleaſure that is very great, though momentary, to the other that is durable, yet very ſmall. Our happineſs therefore depending, not only, upon the ſum of our pleaſures compared with the ſum of our

miſeries, but alſo upon their intenſeneſs and duration, it muſt be influenced in a much greater degree by the privation of thoſe wants, which nature demands, and upon which our exiſtence depends, than upon thoſe which are out of nature, and which are created only by voluptuouſneſs and caprice. We are not permitted to refuſe to nature her wants, but are commanded to controul all factitious deſires, and to look upon all things out of nature as unneceſſary. If the rich are tortured by imaginary wants, reaſon and reflection might allay and counteract them; but where are the powers of reaſoning that can reſiſt the imperious calls of hunger and thirſt? where is the oratory that will convince the wretch bending under the preſſure of ſuch phyſical wants, as have ſhaken even the Saviour of the world, that he has more reaſons for contentment, than the rich who is inconvenienced by only moral wants, which the reaſoning exerted of the loweſt of the ſpecies might reſiſt and overcome. But if the rich approach ſo nearly the poor n wretchedneſs, ſurely that ſyſtem is bad, which tends to create

create only the two extremes; and plunges one half of the ſociety into all the agonies of want and deſpair, to deſtroy the other half by all the horrors of apathy and languor. The enormous wealth of Lord Clive, the procuring which had ſpread famine and death over the vaſt regions of Indoſtan, inſtead of being ſufficient to diſpel, encreaſed the gloomy remorſe which induced him to deſtroy himſelf. The wealth, acquired by the honeſt induſtry and inceſſant labour of hundreds of Britiſh families * now pining in want, and

* Their crime conſiſted in forming eſtabliſhments, ſanctioned by acts of parliament, on this neutral iſland to diſpoſe of the manufactures of their country. They remitted to Great Britain in the courſe of a few years in the ſingle article of Tobacco—one million, ſix hundred thouſand pounds ſterling. This article was found to be of ſuch importance to the revenue, that a particular act of parliament paſſed, to encourage its importation into Great Britain, through the medium of this iſland. In conſequence of this ſanction numbers were decoyed to this entrepot; all whoſe property, without any declaration, or even expectation of war between their high Mightineſſes and the crown of Great Britain, without any previous warning to return to their countr y—was confiſcated. So groſs, and enormous a

which was confiſcated at the Dutch iſland of St. Euſtatius by the unjuſt and mercileſs hand of military power, muſt forever interrupt the happineſs, although it might adminiſter to the voluptuouſneſs of Rodney and Vaughan.

Could all the miſeries of the weak ſacrificed to the fallacious happineſs of the powerful, be concentered to a point, ſo enormous a maſs of calamity, occaſioned to procure an ideal good, and often a poſitive evil, would create a univerſal, and everlaſting horror at all, that vote any reſemblance to riches or

violation of every law of juſtice and humanity, has met with the odium and exceration of all Europe. The unfortunate ſufferers however ſtill remain ruined, and unredreſſed, notwithſtanding the cry that nothing ſhould be held ſo ſacred as property. But now iniquity triumphs, and guilt remains unpuniſhed, becauſe it is ſaid to be inexpedient to bring ſuch powerful offenders to juſtice, or to make reſtitution to theſe injured and oppreſſed ſubjects, becauſe funds are wanting. Millions are readily voted to deſtroy men in wars, none are to be found to ſave them from deſtruction! Cruel and abſurd policy that conſtitutes the happineſs of a nation in the ruin of its beſt, becauſe moſt induſtrious ſubjects.

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power. We look with abhorrence on the rapacious tyger ſpringing from victim to victim, gorged with carnage yet ſtill thirſting for blood, and after maſſacreing whole troops of animals, ſeizing with equal rapacity every new victim that falls within his fatal gripe. With deteſtation we behold the ravages of this inſatiable animal, with what eagerneſs we unite to reſiſt and exterpate him? Why is it that the tygers of the human race do not excite in us the ſame emotions? that we are not equally unanimous in repeling their cruelties and extortions? It is, that man in ſociety is jealous and puſillanimous, educated by it to believe, that his happineſs depends upon the miſery of his fellow creature, and that his fortune can only be raiſed upon the downfal of his neighbour. It is, that it has been the barbarous policy of thoſe, whoſe buſineſs is to regulate the actions of mankind, multiplies as much as poſſible theſe means of hatred and diviſion; and promotes that ſpirit of companies, and corporations which only intereſts itſelf in turning the

the general ruin to its own private advantage, and will never oppoſe diſorders however diſtructive to the ſtate, if beneficial to the party. Hence we ſee men living together without any concurrence of inclination, ſacrificed one after the other to the wanton ambition or avarice of tyrants, without the courage to reſiſt, or the unanimity to enſure ſucceſs.

The happineſs of a people is principally ſecured by a ſmall number of good yet ſimple rules; for experience has taught us, that juſtice is loſt in the multiplicity of laws. But unfortunately for nations, the moſt ſimple, yet the wiſeſt, have hitherto been unknown or neglected by legiſlators. Or is it, that they have been unwilling to ſacrifice the leaſt part of their authority to the public felicity? But if we believe in the maxim, that whatever we think poſſible will one day come to paſs, legiſlators may yet ariſe who will diffuſe among the people an equality of happineſs, if not an equality of riches, and receive from future generations the tribute of eternal gratitude,

tude. At preſent there exiſts in ſociety only two unfortunate claſſes; the one, poor and miſerable, unable to ſatisfy its wants but after the moſt exceſſive and painful labour; the other, gorged with every ſuperfluity, but a prey to all the horrors of inſenſibility. If indigence is painful, the dreadful ſenſations attending upon palled appetites is nearly as agonizing. How many of the rich do I daily ſee driving in the moſt ſpendid carriages from door to door, in ſearch of relief from the horrid languor occaſioned by idleneſs. They are ignorant of thoſe powerful feelings, which conſtitute the happineſs of middling life. Weak ſenſations make no impreſſion upon us, and to be powerful they muſt be new. But where is the wealth to be found that can purchaſe the new ſcenes neceſſary to relieve the languor of the lazy rich—Too indolent to go out of the courſe, which hath ſo often diſappointed them of game; they ſtill purſue the ſhadow which eludes their graſp, and fall at once a prey to all the diſtreſs of their ſituation, and the horror of being unable to extricate themſelves from it. It is

not the poor who deſire great riches, a ſmall fortune will ſatisfy all the wants of a man regularly and moderately employed. But the riches of the world would not ſatisfy the voluptuouſneſs of the pampered monſter—he deſtroys whole villages to extend his Park, deprives multitudes of the common neceſſaries of life, to ſupply him with ſuperfluities which he cannot enjoy. Hence the enormous taxes raiſed upon the diſtreſſes of a nation, to indulge the caprices of a whore, or the covetouſneſs of a biſhop.

I cannot forbear to mention in this place, a ſtory I once heard a French man relate, of the ſurpriſe and indignation of two ſavages who happened to be in France during the reign of Charles the IX. Upon their return home their countrymen enquired of them, what they had ſeen in France, that had appeared to them to be the moſt extraordinary and wonderful; they ſaid, that they found amongſt the French, men glutted, and gorged with all ſorts of commodities, and that their halves, (for in their language they call men, the halves of one another) were begging at their gates, ſhivering

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ing with cold and hunger; that they were aſtoniſhed how theſe halves ſo neceſſitous, could ſubmit to ſuch injuſtice—that they did not ſeize the others by the throat, or ſet fire to their houſes. I do not mention this anecdote either to excite an adoption of ſuch ſentiments, or to hold them up for admiration, as I conſider nothing more deſtructive to that equality of rights which ought to exiſt in all countries, than the not ſecuring to every man, the advantages, he might have acquired by his talents either of mind or body; and that the ſacred preſervation of property is a duty equally ſtrong, and indiſpenſible upon thoſe who have, and thoſe who have not been fortunate in ſuch acquiſitions. But to ſhew that ſuch groſs inequalities cannot exiſt, without naturally exciting the idea of injuſtice and oppreſſion.

The fineſt ſpectacle that a government can preſent, is that of a people virtuous, laborious and content, and does not conſiſt as we have been told in ſplendid palaces, and ſuperb manſions, from theſe often iſſue famine, and unforeſeen diſtreſs. Their avenues of trees,

elevated grounds, and extenſive parks, may ſtrike the eye of paſſengers with admiration, but by them the hearts of the unfortunate cottagers in the neighbourhood have been wrung with deſpair; by being robbed of their humble, happy ſettlement, that a viſto might be added or a walk extended. The lordly owners of theſe great domains, conſider a ſmall ſum of money, without one word of conſolation, a ſufficient recompence to the miſerable cottager whom his vanity has robbed of the comfort, he enjoyed in his children. They cut off from the reſources his ſmall piece of ground afforded, are driven to ſome other quarter; in the hopes of finding the means of ſupporting themſelves, and their diſtreſſed parents. From whence alſo, they are removed by the humane and tolerant laws of corporations, by the juſt and equal laws of ſettlement; if they have brought nothing with them but their honeſty, induſtry and talents; if their appearance marks only the honeſt and laudable intention of bettering their fortune; but the not having already acquired one.

A ſyſtem

A ſyſtem ſo unjuſt, ſo deſtructive of the natural liberties of mankind, as that of removing a man who has committed no crime, and whoſe only fault is that of poverty, from proſpects, perhaps the moſt flattering, to confine him to the narrow confines of a pariſh, exiſts, I believe, in no other country, but where the Archdeacon declares, it is more the intereſt of the poor to ſtand up for the laws than the rich, where the weak is defended againſt the ſtrong, the humble againſt the powerful, and the Little againſt the Great. But it is ſaid, a man is amply recompenſed for this loſs of independence by the ſupport of the pariſh charity. Charity originally meant kindneſs and protection; but can there be any thing more humilitating and comfortleſs than the charities of the pariſh? Where, independant of the diſeaſes cauſed by the coarſe and ſcanty food with which they are ſupplied, they fall a prey to that ſickneſs of heart, which is engendered by the loſs of liberty. The confinement alone is a ſufficient puniſhment for the moſt enormous crimes. You daily ſee, and ac-

knowledge the force of habit, make allowances for, and accomodate yourſelves, to thoſe of the rich; but you expect the poor to riſe ſuperior to the caſualties of mortality. When the poor murmur at the loſs of liberty, that is being prevented purſuing their ordinary occupations, that uſe hath made eaſy to them, and repine at the cruel alternative, of either ſtarving, or toiling and drudging to obtain a mere ſubſiſtence in a pariſh work-houſe; you then have no conſideration for habits acquired by long cuſtom: they are baſe idle villains, who ought to be tortured until they ſubmit to be foot-ſtools, and vile drudges. When ſtricken in years or overtaken by ſickneſs, they either fall unpitied, unlamented, a victim to their infirmities, or muſt ſubmit to linger out the moments that are left them in thoſe priſons called hoſpitals. Theſe royal and noble inſtitutions, do honor to the name of the founder, and gratify the vanity of their annual ſupporters and ſubſcribers, whoſe names are pompouſly publiſhed in the daily papers, or procure practice to the phyſician who generally

is connected with the great: but they neglect millions pining in diſtreſs, which, the funds thus unfeelingly perverted, would have relieved. Public charities, that is to ſay oſtentatious almſgiving, has ever been a cheat, and never had for its object the one held out to the public. I have ſeen all thoſe whoſe names have been ſubſcribed to them, only anxious for their ſubſcription to appear in the public papers; and ever after wholly unconcerned whether it gave turtle to the gluttonous Church Warden, or bread to the ſtarving family. The humanity, that intereſts itſelf in the relief of a fellow creature, is a want of the ſoul, and cannot content itſelf with forms and appearances, it becomes eſſential to its repoſe, that it ſhould maintain the cauſe of the oppreſſed, that it ſhould penetrate into the moſt diſtant futurity, and prevent by timely relief, thoſe dreadful calamities, which muſt firſt attract public attention, to call forth the exertions of common charity. To be truly unfortunate is alone ſufficient to engage the man of real humanity in the moſt noble

ſacrifices to adminiſter conſolation, and it is generally he, who has himſelf greatly ſuffered, and has been taught by his own ſcars, the celeſtial art of applying with ſucceſs, the oil and the hand of the Samaritan, to the wounds of the unfortunate. He knows that the deepeſt anguiſh is often to be alleviated by one act of kindneſs, by one commiſerating tear ſhed in private over the diſtreſſed; and hence appoints no reporter to deſtroy its mild influence by the rude clamour of applauſe. The preciſe point of grief in a wounded and delicate heart is only to be found by him, who has experienced all the combinations of diſtreſs, and he alone can apply the healing balſam; but muſt ever remain concealed from, and unappeaſed by that man, who never conſiders change of circumſtances, or the nature of the diſtreſs, but blindly preaches contentment to thoſe who are agonized with want, and humility to him who is ſinking with deſpair.

For my part, I look with the greateſt indignation on all thoſe worthleſs flatterers, who attempt to excuſe the inſenſibility of the rich,

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by deſcribing the poor, as a diſcontented ſet of vagabonds, who are never to be ſatisfied; and who always encreaſe their demands in proportion to the kindneſs ſhewn them. I know not, how that may be, but I think you cannot, without an unpardonable degree of barbarity, refuſe the trifling ſuccour that is demanded of you, when you reflect, by how many misfortunes an honeſt man may be reduced to that ſtate. There are, however, men, who labour to deafen the ears of the rich, againſt the voice of ſuffering humanity, by magnifying the excellence of the laws which protect the poor, the unreaſonableneſs of their demands, and the comforts of the houſes appointed to receive them. But who can, without ſhuddering, ſee the contraſt between the luxury of a palace, where every magnificence, and every pleaſure is united with ſo much art, and the wretchedneſs of a pariſh workhouſe, where every miſery, every diſguſt, and even death itſelf is ſurrounded with ſo much horror. The reluctance of the poor, need only be obſerved, at entering into theſe

eſtabliſh-

eſtabliſhments, to be convinced how comfortleſs is their ſituation*. I like better the ancient Roman republican mode of providing for their poor, that of furniſhing grain to the people. The immenſe granaries eſtabliſhed at Rome, from whence corn was daily diſtributed with the moſt noble liberality, made hoſpitals unneceſſary, becauſe they left none in want. In countries where hoſpitals abound, you behold every where the melancholy picture of diſtreſs, and your ears are every where pierced with its bitter complaints. I would, therefore, in-

* This day December 20th. 1773. An inquiſition was taken at Malvern in Worceſterſhire, on the body of Edward Yates, a pariſhoner of White Lady Aſton, who was found dead in a ditch. It appeared on the inqueſt, that this man had reſided at Malvern ſometime under certificate, and, though in a ſtarving condition would not aſk relief leaſt he ſhould be removed to his own pariſh. In his diſtreſs he frequented a turnip field, and there ſubſiſted until he was taken notice of by the owner of the turnips, who threatened to take him before a Juſtice; upon which he diſappeared; and a ſhort time after was found dead as above mentioned. An. Regiſter Vol. XVI.

ſtead of aſſembling the poor together in hoſpitals, where one man gives the ſcarlet fever to that neighbour, from whom he receives the ſmall-pox, diſtribute each day in the private houſes of the ſick, that ſum of money, which is calculated upon an average, he conſumes in a public charity. In this caſe his family, now deprived of the fruits of his induſtry, would be in ſome degree indemnified for the loſs of his labour; as a ſick man requires very little more than ſome nouriſhing broth, the meat that hath made it would give food to his family: and hence a ſyſtem, which is both humane and œconomical would reſcue a number of wretches from beggary and the gallows. For experience has proved, that of the criminals who ſuffer, the majority have iſſued from hoſpitals and priſons.

This ſubject is too important, too intereſting, not to have engaged the attention of ſome humane writers, who have inveſtigated it with a depth and perſpicuity that ought to have obtained its end. But it is diſtreſſing and mortifying to obſerve how every

ſyſtem, big with the future proſperity of millions, is neglected and deſpiſed by thoſe who are appointed by the people to watch over, and to ſecure their happineſs: and that from a perverſion the moſt cruel and unjuſt, they who ought to protect, deſtroy, and oppreſs. He who will have the noble virtue to oppoſe himſelf to exiſting and encreaſing abuſes is now conſidered either a madman, or a traitor, and laws of TREASON are extended to puniſh his ſedition. A word gotten into faſhion to cry down every truth, hower important to the many, if injurious to the privileged few: as, traitor, is applied to all who has the manly virtue to plead the cauſe of the people. It is to me a moſt alarming circumſtance at this important criſis, that the people themſelves, inſtead of joining in one univerſal clamour againſt, have become the echo of their oppreſſors, and ſuffer themſelves to be trampled upon, with a ſupineneſs that prognoſticates their approaching ſlavery and deſtruction. And that notwithſtanding, the majority of legiſlators who are to protect them from

from the inſults and the injuſtice that might be intended againſt them, are appointed, not by the free and unbiaſſed ſuffrage of the nation, but by private companies, and overgrown wealthy individuals, contrary to that plan of liberty which our brave, becauſe free anceſtors fought to ſecure, they tremble at every mention of REFORM. Like the wretched negroe, who, after ſuffering every calamity, and had been tortured with the moſt wanton cruelty and barbarity; upon a change of maſters is ſo infatuated as to fear he ſhall be miſerable. I however conſole myſelf in the hope, that we are not all yet ſo degenerated by luxury and avarice, but that if occaſions ſhould demand him, a Brutus may yet be found who will reſcue us from ſlavery and oppreſſion.

Revolutions prepare themſelves in ſecret, and it appears to me, that ſome favourable change for us is likely to take place. Should it come to paſs, we ſhall not feel ourſelves indebted either to the ſophiſtry or the humanity of the Archdeacon of Carliſle; but to the writings of thoſe enlightened philoſophers

who conſider themſelves amply repaid for every blaſt of calumny, if they have contributed to remove one evil from their country, or opened to it one new proſpect of happineſs.

The indignation at the abuſes, of which I have often been the witneſs, and ſometimes the victim, will, without doubt in the courſe of this letter, have carried me beyond the line of reſpect due from ſo poor a man—to one ſo exalted as yourſelf.—But, nevertheleſs, if I have been able, by ſympathizing with, to dry up the tears of one unfortunate wretch—it will produce, in a much greater degree, than all your reaſons, the contentment of

A POOR LABOURER.

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